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Review of Police Crime and Incident Reports

**West Yorkshire Police
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HM Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) is an independent inspectorate, inspecting policing in the public interest. We monitor, inspect and report on the efficiency and effectiveness of the police service in England and Wales. More information and copies of inspection and review reports are available on our website, www.hmic.gov.uk.

The process for recording crimes and incidents

The crime recording process has three key stages:

- **Recording an incident:** A member of the public calls for police assistance, or a police officer observes or discovers a crime. The police create an incident record.
- **Recording a crime:** If the police decide a crime was committed, they create a crime record (usually straight away).
- **Investigating a crime:** Investigations begin as soon as possible, usually with initial enquiries which look for possible leads and gather evidence (a 'primary investigation'). A more detailed, 'secondary investigation' then takes place to consider the evidence gathered in the initial stages.

Purpose of the review

The Minister of State for Policing and Criminal Justice, Nick Herbert, asked HMIC to inspect the quality of the crime and incident data collected by police forces across England and Wales.

Why is it important to have high quality crime and incident data?

High quality data means that:

- The police can establish the extent, location and victims of crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB), and so plan their work to achieve the best outcomes for victims and their communities;
- The public, the Government and HMIC can get an accurate picture of crime and ASB in a particular area, and judge whether their force's performance represents value for money.

The Government's commitment to public accountability and transparency adds to this need for accurate and consistent data. This will become increasingly important as oversight of the police service is moved away from Whitehall to local police and crime commissioners (PCCs), who will rely on accurate, local information on how well their force is performing.

Who sets the standards for crime and incident recording?

The Home Office sets standards for both crime and incident recording. The National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS) is underpinned by the Home Office Counting Rules (HOCR). These aim to provide consistent standards in all forces and an approach to recording crimes that is based on the needs of the victim.

Review methodology: a note on data collection

HMIC checked the accuracy of a small number of the force's crime and incident records. This was used to flag up any potential issues which could usefully be explored during the review.

Although the sample size was not large enough to be statistically significant, it gives some indication of the quality of the data collected by the force, and of the efficiency of its systems and processes. Some findings from the data collection are therefore included below.

Findings for West Yorkshire Police

Does the force record crimes accurately and consistently?

HMIC looked at 240 incidents logged by West Yorkshire Police. Twenty-four had been wrongly closed without a crime being raised, which indicates that crimes in West Yorkshire are generally recorded accurately and in accordance within NCRS. There was, however, particular concern around the recording of incidents of violence and ASB.

The force employs crime evaluators in each division. We found that they were providing a good service, and ensured that once a crime report was created it was, in most cases, classified correctly.

West Yorkshire Police's incident and crime recording IT systems can be integrated, allowing some data to be copied across automatically from the incident system into the crime recording system when a crime is confirmed; this reduces 'double keying' of information. This was trialled for burglary in 2010, but was abandoned due to technical problems. These issues have since been resolved and the force will soon be reintroducing this system (initially for burglary, then in turn for all offence types).

The force would benefit from putting more information into its incident logs. This would help ensure that they are correctly classified, and that (where appropriate) incidents are recorded as crimes.

What is the quality of the investigation and service to victims?

The force's investigation standards checklist provides officers with a template for ensuring minimum standards are met. This is then available for scrutiny within the crime recording system. Most crime records examined showed good investigation standards.

West Yorkshire Police did not appear to have a strategy and policy for delivering the quality incident and crime data that the force needs. Such a strategy should include, for example, steps to put in place effective investigative policies to maximise the quality of primary investigations, and an outline of an approach to crime investigation which is based around the needs of the victim.

How does the force ensure that standards are met?

HMIC found that chief officer leadership on incident and crime data quality was neither clear, visible, nor recognised by staff. Police authority oversight in this area was partial: the authority was aware of force internal audits, but was not presented with the results – and had not asked for them

Staff did recognise the importance of incident and crime quality and recording, and had a clear understanding of the HOOCR. Those in contact management roles (ie call takers, dispatchers, and crime evaluators) also showed a strong commitment to data quality. However, the leadership on this comes from divisional managers, rather than from one of the force chief officers. It is important that the Force Crime and Incident Registrar is fully supported by senior management and has the staff to carry out regular audits of incidents and crimes.

Conclusions

HMIC found only limited arrangements at a senior level to secure the quality of incident and crime data in West Yorkshire, with uncertain plans, policies and strategies. As a result, there were variable standards around recording crimes and incidents in a consistent and accurate manner (so they correctly reflect the sequence of events as described by victims). Staff's skills and awareness of their responsibilities in this area were insufficiently established to help secure incident and crime data quality, and the audit and quality assurance processes in use to identify issues and take action were superficial.